



HQ AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB TX



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NEW: 3rd Infantry captures Baghdad's airport

By Sig Christenson

Express-News Military Writer

Web Posted : 04/04/2003 11:39 AM

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The 3rd Infantry Division's Task Force 3-69 overcame sporadic resistance Thursday night and early today to seize one of this war's biggest trophies, Saddam International Airport.

Thousands of troops converged after dawn today on the airport, a civilian and military complex on Baghdad's southwest side that contains seven palaces used by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"This is a regime icon," the task force's commander, Lt. Col. Rock Marcone, said of the airport complex. "It proves he doesn't have control over the country, and it proves he doesn't have any way of stopping this coalition. We move around this country at will, and there's nothing he can do about it."

The task force didn't lose a man in capturing the airport and reported just two wounded. By noontime, the task force said 80 Iraqis had been killed in combat, 20 others were wounded — one a 15-year-old boy — and 44 were taken prisoner.

In a disturbing development, vials of atropine — a nerve agent antidote — were found in a hotel near the airport. A drug similar to Valium, Clopram, also was recovered.

Both drugs are used to treat soldiers exposed to such deadly chemical weapons as VX and sarin, the Army said.

No chemical weapons were found in bunkers that dot the airport, but artillery shells of unknown types were found.

In another development, a journalist was killed tonight with his Army driver when their Humvee rolled into an irrigation canal south of Baghdad. The names of both men were withheld pending notification of their families, but the Washington Post identified the journalist as one of its embedded reporters, Mike Kelly. Kelly was one of the paper's columnists and an editor-at-large for the Atlantic Monthly.

The battle for the airport pitted more than 4,000 U.S. troops, 44 M1A1 tanks and 88 Bradley armored personnel carriers against a much smaller and disorganized force from the Republican Guard's Medina Division. Though Iraqi soldiers from the division were badly routed only two days ago in fighting at a bridge near the town of Nayir Al Ajil, about 20 miles south of Baghdad, they weren't finished fighting.

At dusk today they fired artillery rounds at the airport's north side. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Prisoners who sat under a broiling sun this morning with Army interrogators sketched a picture of plunging morale, saying that 200 Iraqis had deserted their posts at the airport before the fight. Though many wore the green uniforms and cheap black boots of the Iraqi army, several said they weren't servicemen.

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3rd Infantry captures Baghdad's airport, Con't

One POW who did admit to serving in the Republican Guard as a chef said a number of soldiers at the airport also had fought at the bridge, dubbed "Objective Peach" by Army commanders.

Most of the Iraqis captured after the battle for the bridge reported widespread desertions, saying their officers fled the area before the fighting began, said Spc. Robert Hall, 21, of Silverdale, Wash.

"They knew it was coming, and they told all the Republican Guard guys to stay and fight," he said.

Flush from victory in a wild series of battles at the bridge that began Wednesday and concluded after dawn Thursday, the task force later that afternoon packed up and headed north as the division's advance guard for Baghdad. A column of tanks, armored personnel carriers, Humvees and other vehicles ran eight miles long, stirring up thick clouds of dust while driving slowly through the sparsely populated countryside.

In an almost surreal scene, the convoy drew often-supportive crowds as it inched past burned-out vehicles and the corpses of Iraqis killed only hours before by allied airstrikes and ground fire. Iraqis lined the city streets of Mulla Fayyad and Yusufiyah, many waving and smiling, but some gave the thumbs-up sign, a derogatory symbol in the Arab world.

"As we were leaving the town, there was a small cluster of men standing on the right side of the road," said Army Maj. Jim Arnold, a 39-year-old physician's assistant from San Antonio. "My window was down and I gained eye contact with a man. He yelled at me and, in a condescending tone and a lot of ire in his voice, asked me, 'Do you know why you're here?' I simply kept my mouth shut."

An hour later, a group of Army scouts was ambushed by a group of about 40 Iraqis armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, or RPGs. Two scouts were wounded, one seriously, after being hit in the head by shrapnel.

The task force's lead company, a group of about 160 troops with four tanks and 10 Bradleys, then rushed to aid the scouts. About half the Iraqis were believed killed in that action, and the others broke off contact with the Americans, who fought for about 10 minutes.

"We already knew they took two casualties, and we knew one required medivacs, so we knew that was serious," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Travis Crosby, 25, of Metter, Ga.

"And they had the high ground and we had the low ground. What a great situation," he said. "The only thing about an ambush is you have to get shot at first before you know where they're at."

Once the fighting ended, the company went to the airport and set up positions without facing any Iraqi resistance. Marcone said the Americans slipped into the airport unnoticed because the Iraqis were asleep in their bunkers.

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At daybreak the longer Army column, which stopped for the night on a one-lane road several miles from the airport, got rolling for the final push to Saddam International. But moments after turning onto Highway 1 just after 6:05 a.m., troops in the column saw a dozen Saddam loyalists wearing black ninja-style uniforms.

Though the Iraqis realized they had been spotted, they stood on the ridge, talked with each other and then spread out. Moments later, both sides exchanged heavy gunfire. Three RPGs were fired, two of them narrowly missing a number of soldiers and one reporter.

The other RPG flew underneath the truck, skipped off the ground, and struck Army Sgt. Sirvantis Dennis, 27, of Fort Stewart, Ga., on his chest and an ammunition pouch as it hit his bulletproof vest.

Marcone said the second ambush targeted a 20-vehicle convoy led by the task force's tactical operations center. U.S. troops returned fire, killing all the Iraqis before moving on to the airport, where a command center was established.

"Our plan was simple," he said. "Speed was our protection to get up here, and then once we got up here in good form, I think we surprised them. We got in on top of them before they could put any coherent defense together. We were all over them."



AETC Bases News Clips

Columbus AFB MS



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Mayor weighs options on high-rise permit

Mayor A.J. Holloway is still considering his options after the Biloxi City Council revoked a building permit this week for an 18-story high-rise, but he cannot veto the council's decision.

Usually, the mayor has veto authority over resolutions passed by the council, but not in this case, according to a 1999 attorney general's opinion. The permit was revoked as a result of the council amending its minutes to correct an error. The minutes are the official record of the council, which is the legislative branch of city government.

Britt Singletary, a lawyer for the developer of the Sea Breeze Condominium Resort, said he would sue the city after the council voted to revoke the permit Tuesday night. The council relied on an audiotape of a previous meeting to determine whether it allowed the development a six-month or an 18-month extension to obtain a city permit.

A majority of the council amended the minutes to show a six-month extension and to revoke construction permits that were issued last month.



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One of Saddam's 78 palaces now is a dusty fixer-upper

By Sig Christenson

Express-News Military Writer

Web Posted : 04/06/2003 12:00 AM

BAGHDAD, Iraq — It's a castle fit for a king, complete with a grand entrance, marble floors, sparkling chandeliers and, of course, gold-plated faucets, toilets and bidets.

Only the best for Saddam Hussein, his family and friends.

A 10-minute drive from the sprawling airport that until Saturday bore his name, Saddam's opulent four-bedroom, climate-controlled lake house is but one of many palaces reserved for the ruler of Iraq, a country of earthen and cinderblock homes that often lack power and running water, let alone air conditioning.

"You see how important he is compared to the rest of the people," Lt. Peter Ricci, 23, of Richmond Hill, Ga., and formerly San Diego, Calif., said Saturday. "It's quite a contrast."

A tour of the palace, one of seven near what U.S. troops now are calling Baghdad International Airport, offered a hint Saturday afternoon of just how well Saddam and his clan have lived since he came to power in the late 1970s.

The exclusive compound, walled off from the world to ensure Saddam's safety as much as his privacy, has taken a turn for the worse since the war began.

A pair of large, heavy wooden doors that run more than 20 feet high were open when a group of 3rd Infantry Division soldiers and two journalists arrived at the house.

Shards of tinted glass littered the marble floors. Beds were unkempt, and intruders had rifled through a bookcase downstairs, apparently taking a set of knives. A flip of a switch didn't turn on the lights, indicating the mansion was connected to the Baghdad power grid.

Curiously, the phone was on, but it yielded a busy signal when a San Antonio Express-News reporter and photographer tried to check in with their bosses and bill it to Saddam.

Until now, Saddam has lived it up. He owned 78 presidential palaces, with European marble and crystal chandeliers. Thirty-two of them are in the greater Baghdad area, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Declared off-limits to United Nations inspectors since 1997, the palaces and their surrounding compounds are, the paper said, suspected of containing prohibited weapons.



A U.S. soldier walks through a large four-bedroom, climate-controlled lake house belonging to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein near the international airport in Baghdad. Task Force 3-69 is taking furniture from nearby mansions to use in the command center it is setting up at the airport. Bahram Mark Sobhani/Express-News

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One of Saddam's 78 palaces now is a dusty fixer-upper, Con't.

No weapons were found during an hourlong tour of the mansion, but a handsome English-made leather holster was discovered in the drawer of Saddam's downstairs bookcase.

The office was just to the left of a beautiful white marble staircase that rises from the center of the mansion. A huge living room with gold-trimmed, overstuffed couches and chairs is to the right of the stairway, smaller light fixtures and oil paintings of pastoral scenes anchoring the marble walls.

Just left of the staircase is a painting of Saddam in traditional Arab garb, a horse at his side. It's similar to dozens of murals that dot the airport complex, much of it now in ruins.

The palace's long, rectangular kitchen wasn't quite fit for a king, actually appearing quite ordinary.

There were no fancy patterns in the china, no state seals or military insignia. It did have a 5-foot-long stainless steel commercial stove. The silverware bore a symbol of what appeared to be an eagle or phoenix. Both the china and utensils were wrapped in clear plastic.

A one-lane road and canal front the palace, which is perhaps a tad fancier than Tony Soprano's estate. Its stone façade wraps 360 degrees in a set of staggered, retreating rectangular blocks that run three stories high.

There isn't much of a back yard and no barbecue pit, but the large, green lake that stretches for close to 200 yards more than makes up for that. So, too, does the vista from the second-floor master bedroom, where a gold-plated crystal chandelier hangs over the bed.

"This is probably the lake you always see him in," Capt. Dave Benton, 36, of Hinesville and originally Fulton, Mo., said as he stared out a shattered window, referring to photos of Saddam taking summer swims.

"He was nice and protected when he was in here."

And pampered.

Downstairs, a bathroom has gold-plated fixtures. A roll of toilet paper remained in it, a surprise given the shortage of good tissue among American troops here. An unopened bar of Palmolive Naturals soap rested next to the bathtub.

Upstairs in the master bedroom, the queen-size bed has an elaborately engraved headboard. As in the other three bedrooms, there's an armoire here, and of course it matches the bed and other furniture. The spigots in the bathroom sink, shower and bidet are gold-trimmed, if not made of gold itself.

"It's a beautiful view. Look at this," Capt. Todd Kelly, 31, of Savannah, Ga., and formerly Cary, N.C., said as he studied colorful ceramic crown molding in the room that may have been used by Saddam.

"It's definitely a VIP retreat," said Lt. Kyle Wiginton, 24, of Savannah and formerly of Cairo, Ga., about a half-hour north of Tallahassee.

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Surprisingly, not everything is first-class for a leader whose ego is so big his image is found in every town square across Iraq, a desert nation the size of California.

Take the TV sets and video recorders. Folks might think Saddam would have the latest widescreen plasma televisions and DVD players, but not so. Each room has big, bulky TVs and VCRs that appear to come straight out of the early 1980s.

Rabbit ears that could have been bought at Sears or Radio Shack when Ronald Reagan was president protrude from atop some of the sets, suggesting there's no cable.

Now vacant and decaying, this residence is haunted the way once-proud mansions of Hollywood stars have been through the years. The slim brown roach scurrying on the master bedroom's expensive marble floor, now collecting a thick layer of dust during the maid's extended absence, could be a metaphor for Saddam's downhill slide.

Still, as Benton paced the room he saw plenty of potential in this home, which might make a great fixer-upper and be available these days at a bargain-basement price.

"It's not a bad place," he observed. "Amazing, isn't it?"



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Troops offer final salute to comrade

By Sig Christenson

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 04/07/2003 12:00 AM

BAGHDAD — They called his name Sunday, but for the first time Sgt. 1st Class Wilbert Davis didn't answer.

"Davis, Wilbert," cried 1st Sgt. Nathan Plummer.

"Sgt. Davis, Wilbert. Sgt. 1st Class Davis, Wilbert."

Tears rolled down the eyes of some of the 800 soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division who gathered on a cool morning at the international airport here for a ceremony marking Davis' life and Army legacy.

Described as a straight-shooting boss with a wonderful sense of humor, Davis, 40, of Hinesville, Ga., was killed Thursday night when the Humvee he was driving flipped into a canal south of Baghdad.

He was the first soldier in Task Force 3-69 to die in the war with Iraq.

Washington Post columnist and Atlantic Monthly editor Michael Kelly, 46, also died in the accident, becoming the first embedded reporter to be killed in the war.

"He was a professional, a warrior and a patriot. He was always positive. He was a joy to be around," Task Force commander Lt. Col. Rock Marccone said of Davis in a speech to the troops.

"His word was his bond. He was a man of God, driven by his religion and faith. He was a father, a husband and a good man."

A 13-year Army veteran, Davis leaves behind his wife, Huiok, and two children, Will and Terri.

But he had an extended family in the Army as well, a seven-man vehicle maintenance team he molded and led in the Iraqi war.

They looked lost Sunday.

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Troops offer final salute to comrade, Con't.

The team's new leader, Staff Sgt. Elias Camacho, wiped tears from his eyes after the 45-minute ceremony.

In a short speech, Camacho recalled Davis' smile and how "he always talked trash, kept me going."

"We used to joke. I told the sergeant, 'Hey, I've got the team.' Now I've got the team," said Camacho, 30, of Port Isabel.

The tight-knit team works on M1A1 tanks, an M88A1 tank recovery vehicle, big trucks, personnel carriers and Humvees.

The seven mechanics work 15- to 18-hour days, often tackling problems together.

The maintenance and repair work they do is critical to the task force, which relies on its heavy armor to win battles. Tanks, in particular, can prove temperamental, as one did last week when it kept overheating.

After the service, team members said Davis not only was the center of gravity in their lives, he was a force of will as well, using his keen eye for each person's quirks to improve his or her performance.

"He understood everybody on the team. He had the courage to tell you about your mistakes, strengths and weaknesses," said Sgt. David Rispress, 33, of Hinesville.

"He was really good at correcting you and then making you still feel like you were worth something," said Sgt. Malcolm Ivers, 34, of Fort Stewart, Ga.

"He would always pretty much be up on my butt all day long," said Pvt. Andrew Cook, 23, of Hopkinsville, Ky. "It was for my own good."

Many soldiers came to Iraq apprehensive about the conflict, and Davis was no exception.

Cook said everyone wrestled with the same fears, but Davis would "talk to us about it, tell us everything would be good, we'd all be going home."

They soldier on in grief. They know there's a war to fight.



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Troops offer final salute to comrade, Con't.

An hour after dark Sunday, scores of task force members looked skyward as Iraqi air defenses launched a flurry of anti-aircraft shells.

The red "Triple-A" shells streaked up to 9,000 feet and harmlessly exploded, offering a light show most everyone enjoyed.

Things got serious when "Glory's Guns," the task force's artillery, fired volleys back at the Iraqis, the low cloud ceiling trapping the sound of each exploding shell and making it sound like a huge clap of thunder.

The end of the day was a marked contrast to its start.

After 1st Sgt. Plummer called Davis' name Sunday morning, taps sounded on speakers mounted atop a Humvee used by the task force's psychological operations team.

"This is not a pleasant experience," said Maj. Mike Johnson, 38, of Hinesville. "Taps is not a pleasant song."



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Christenson: The retro look

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted : 04/06/2003 5:24 PM

Monday, April 7 On Sunday, we chilled.

Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division's Task force 3-69 got settled in at Baghdad International Airport, putting down cots, listening to music on CD players in small groups and getting a surprise shipment of Pepsi, 7-Up and orange soda.

A day after being told they could take off the full-body chem suits they'd worn through the duration of the war, many troops were freshly scrubbed and wearing their far more comfortable desert camouflage uniforms.

I got with the program.

For starters, I took my first real "shower" in more than three weeks. Since leaving our base camp in Kuwait, all of us had taken "Baby Wipe Baths." Those damp, sanitized cloth strips are no substitute for a real shower or bath, but damned welcome in a desert where sand cakes deeply in both ears and darkens your skin to the point that you think you're tanning.

I stripped next to my Humvee, parked discreetly away from the troops, and poured water over the top of my head from a 5-gallon drum. Then I scrubbed myself with Irish Spring soap, rinsed off and felt like a totally new man.

But I wasn't done.

There was the matter of my hair. Thick and clumpy like the fur on a muddy dog after two big sandstorms and a month in the desert, it had to go. I couldn't stand it anymore.

Just how bad was it? "To be honest with you sir, really bad," said my barber, Spc. Charles Gilbreath, 27, of Fort Stewart, Ga., and formerly Thomas County, in southern Georgia. "It was more dirt in your hair than you had hair."

I got a flat top.

Put some jell on the top of my head and I'll look like a character from a 1950s movie.

The last time I looked like this was in the mid-1960s, when I was around 8 or 9. That's when I told my dad that I would grow my hair like John Lennon, my hero in those days. My father replied, "The hell you will," but I did.

It was the beginning of an estrangement that was at once inevitable and sad. He didn't understand the Beatles or the 1960s, and didn't like to see his only son stolen from him by America's pop culture.

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Christenson: The retro look, Con't

Dad died in 1968 and was no doubt spared the horror of seeing my mop-top grow ever longer as the Beatles were eclipsed by a new generation of longhair musicians. In the early '70s, my buddies Rex and Scott Adams would get their hair clipped just as school ended each spring. Ashamed, they'd hide their shaved skulls under baseball caps for the summer.

I've gone through beards, long hair, short hair and most everything in between, but have been keeping things shorter as I've grown into middle age.

Now, I've gone retro.

Dad, I hope you're smiling up there.



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NEW: Soldier walks away after showdown with grenade

By Sig Christenson

Express-News Military Writer

Web Posted : 04/04/2003 2:44 PM

OUTSIDE BAGHDAD, Iraq — A dozen men in black pajama uniforms scurried around a sandy ridge early today, talking with each other excitedly as they spied the American convoy below.

Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division's Task Force 3-69 saw them and took cover behind armored personnel carriers and Humvees before training their weapons on the enemy troops 300 yards away.

Suddenly, rifles on both sides blazed, bullets hissing past the troops and pinging on metal. Then a rocket-propelled grenade, or RPG, flew underneath a truck used by two close-air support controllers, skipped off the ground and struck Army Sgt. Sirvantis Dennis, 27, of Fort Stewart, Ga., on his chest and an ammunition pouch.

But, miraculously, didn't explode.

"I can't believe it. I tell you I was in shock," Dennis said. "After the round came up and hit me, I was shocked, so I just dove. It didn't go off, but the one after that went boom."

A St. Petersburg, Fla., native, Dennis and four other men standing nearby should be dead today, but instead they are perhaps the luckiest American soldiers of the war in Iraq. He walked away from the collision with a superficial cut on his right hand, caused by one of the rocket's small fins, while the others weren't hurt.

The battle opened in almost precisely the same spot as an ambush the night before, not far from the town of Bayt Hushin Al Abbas. The black-clad soldiers, believed to be survivors of the night attack, were easily spotted as they tried to flank the American convoy.

They were seen in binoculars talking to each other while spreading out on the ridge. But the Iraqis did not move quickly, and they didn't immediately seek cover even after it became obvious that the Americans were onto them.

A psychological operations crew sped toward the Iraqis in a truck with large speakers mounted on its roof in hopes of persuading them to surrender. Soldiers in the Army column, however, realized the Iraqis were spoiling for a fight.

They took cover behind armored vehicles idling on the road and trained their rifles at the high ground. An unnerving silence settled over the road for a few minutes until a flurry of gunfire erupted from both sides.

The first grenade exploded just in front of the Air Force Humvee and an M577A2 command-and-control vehicle, which offers a long, high wall of protection. Another blew up above the vehicles. Shrapnel cut through the Humvee's plastic tarp four inches behind the passenger-side back seat and a laptop computer in a backpack.

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Soldier walks away after showdown with grenade, Con't

The last grenade skipped on the ground until it slid under the truck and hit Dennis on the ceramic chest plate of his bulletproof vest.

Some of the troops expected a quick, uneventful drive to the airport after crushing elements of the Republican Guard's Medina Division in recent fighting.

"We thought it was going to be an easy ride to the airport, a victory ride," said Pfc. Brandon Ellis, 20, of Asheboro, N.C.

Yet if the Iraqis were intense, so, too, were the Americans. Spc. Richard Byers reached for his M-203, a grenade launcher mounted on an M-16 rifle. Air Force Capt. Shad Magann, 30, of Jacksonville, Fla., squeezed off rounds from his rifle, then dropped the empty clip and inserted another.

Rather than lean against an armored vehicle for cover, Senior Airman Dan Housley stood almost in the open and fired his rifle, his face stony.

"I got mad," Housley, 22, of Huntsville, Texas, explained, noting that a bullet whizzed past his head.

"I was like shocked. I guess a little bit of fear took hold of me for a little while," Spc. Jason Roberts, 22, of Houston, said, adding that he shot off five M-16 clips, or 150 rounds.

"Looking at the battle scars on the trailer and the track, that was too damned close," said Byers, 31, of Killeen, Texas.

After getting his hand treated and taped, Dennis took the rest of the afternoon off. He went to work tonight, something of a star of the task force, and received a new nickname: "Superman."

"I'm going to have to keep this vest," said Dennis, who'll have a tale to tell and a war trophy to show for years to come when asked to explain how he won his Purple Heart. "When I get back they're going to have to do a statement of charges. (The vest) costs about \$560, but oh well. It's worth it."



AETC Bases News Clips

Goodfellow AFB TX



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First-captured Iraqi base rebuilt for allies' needs sets example for future

By TARA COPP
Scripps Howard News Service

A FORWARD AIR BASE, Iraq — Two weeks after the U.S. military captured this former Iraqi air force base, it's beginning to seem much like any other mid-size American airfield — minus the indoor plumbing and shelter.

While U.S. personnel reconfigure the facility, the Air Force is preparing to annex fields closer to Baghdad.

At this first base in southern Iraq, the Americans have even named the wild dogs that roam nearby. "Kujo" and "Boots" tag along the Army guards manning the gate.

They've put up a sign, too: "Welcome to Bush International Airport." The idea, the guards said, was to keep moving the sign north as more airfields become U.S. installations. The sign's final destination would be Baghdad's Saddam International Airport.

A 13-man squadron with the 17th Security Forces at Goodfellow Air Force Base is among those who helped secure the airfield.

American flags are raised at the front gate and on top of hangars that house the personnel who maintain the HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters

"I think (the base) will play a role in the ability to provide humanitarian relief for the country."

— Col. Cesar Rodriguez,
commander of the 332nd
Air Expeditionary Wing

and A-10 attack planes that fly in and out.

Seizing and then using Iraqi airfields was part of the overall strategy months before the war began, said Col. Cesar Rodriguez, commander of the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing.

Several thousand U.S. personnel now occupy the base. They've established a field hospital, and regular convoys are delivering construction materials. The base, with its 12,000-foot runway, brings in a constant stream of HC-130 transport planes — making it likely American troops will be stationed there for the long term.

"I think it will play a role in the ability to provide humanitarian relief for the country," Rodriguez said.

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BASES: Northern Iraq airfield under observation for U.S. use

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"The capability of the runway itself allows you to bring in big airplanes that can bring in lots and lots of humanitarian relief."

Three-star Air Force Gen. Mike Moseley, who flew in under cover of darkness just a few days ago, was taken aback by the rapid growth.

"We flew 50 airplanes out of here today," Moseley said on his way to talk to some of the pilots, whose cots are under the cement-and-sand Iraqi hangar.

Even before this war started, planners assessed "which airfields could be more capable of supporting operations, and how quickly they could be put into use."

— Col. Cesar Rodriguez

"Who would have thought that?"

Meanwhile, at least one airfield in the north is under observation. It's smaller than this one but has a 4,500-foot runway that also can accommodate cargo planes.

"There's an airfield way

north where they're doing the same thing that they are doing here, and they are bringing in ground reinforcements for a northern opportunity," Rodriguez said.

The idea of seizing and using enemy assets isn't new

Rodriguez said that during World War II, Axis powers, pushing Allied forces to the Atlantic, "gained territory and space to their advantage. And as we moved them back, out of the territories of France and all the occupied territories, we rebuilt airfields and that enabled us to bring air power."

So even before this war started, planners assessed "which airfields could be more capable of supporting operations, and how quickly they could be put into use," he said. "A lot of that has to do with

whether the enemy cooperates or not . . . whether or not they have booby-trapped the field."

A key role of seized bases would be in the rearming of aircraft closer to areas of conflict.

Rodriguez said there are about 30 airfields being evaluated. Some are just big enough to provide landing opportunities for helicopters; others are the size of Saddam International Airport.

Scripps Howard correspondent
Tara Copp can be reached
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